

AS THE SOUTH GROWS

In its As the South Grows series of reports, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) and its partner Grantmakers for Southern Progress (GSP) have begun exploring the challenges and opportunities to increase equity in Southern communities. Foundations, as the data and others' lived experience demonstrates, have for too long neglected funding the most promising structural change strategies in the South. As the South Grows is an attempt to examine the reasons for that neglect and to propose solutions.

Southern communities are on the front lines of an ongoing global climate crisis, one whose threats grow in scope and magnitude each day. In many ways, Southerners have been among the first to learn what it's like to live with a new climate – the more hostile one we have created for ourselves over decades of living outside our planetary means. More intense storms, hastening sea level rise, agricultural disturbances and other climate factors present an existential threat to Southern communities and an uncontrollable, exponential one for the country. Many Southerners know this; they understand the threats and their enablers in concentrated, reactive, corporate-backed power. Although many of those same Southerners are organizing and mobilizing around a resilient and just new future, foundation investment in Southern communities does not match that reality.

Between 2010 and 2014, foundation support for communities in Eastern North Carolina and Southern Louisiana did not meet the challenge presented by environmental threats, nor did it capitalize on the

opportunities for long-term structural change that are growing at the grassroots in these two regions.

During this five-year period, only 4 percent of foundation funding to support work in Eastern North Carolina was designated for systemic change strategies such as community organizing, advocacy and policy change work. In Southern Louisiana, that number was 8 percent, but almost all of that systemic change funding went to New Orleans. Outside of Orleans Parish, just 0.3 percent of all funding in Southern Louisiana was invested in systemic change strategies.¹

THE BOTTOM LINE

Climate change presents an exponential and existential threat for people across the South – and for the nation more broadly – but foundation grantmaking to date does not reflect that reality. Southern communities' and our national complacency with racialized poverty puts whole communities and the whole region in greater danger from climate crises. Hurricane Katrina was the clearest and most tragic illustration of that complacency and its real cost in dollars, in community trust and in lives.

The political and economic deprivation at the root of entrenched poverty stretches from the dislocation of

1. Orleans Parish and the city of New Orleans are coterminous. For the purposes of analyzing funding data, NCRP has separated Orleans Parish from the surrounding Southern Louisiana region in some places because New Orleans has historically been the recipient of a large majority of funding to benefit the Southern Louisiana region.

executive summary

Native peoples to enslavement and disenfranchisement of African Americans through the exploitation of poor Appalachian communities and continues today in the marginalization of Hispanic immigrant communities, among other ways. Our national economy has prospered and continues to prosper as a result of these forms of marginalization, and we share responsibility for making it right nationally – all of us.

Southern communities need to be whole in order to remain resilient in the face of ongoing climate crises – culturally, socially, economically and politically. Philanthropy within and outside the South has a key role to play in supporting Southern leaders who seek to build that community cohesion necessary to overcome environmental threats. When foundations prioritize protecting communities from climate shocks, those communities will be empowered to lead on other environmental goals like protecting physical ecosystems and regulating harmful industries. In the end, environmental self-determination is the most sustainable and effective path to climate resilience.

For all the challenges Southern communities have faced, and for all the deep personal and communal wounds that persist because of the region's history of racial oppression and violence, the more than 100 interviews that informed this research echoed two refrains: Southerners take care of each other, and Southerners are deeply, personally invested in their home – in their land.

That history of mutual aid and rooted community life is, as with most things, complicated. But the truth it holds represents perhaps one of the South's most valuable assets given the growing threat climate change presents. Climate change is already deeply, irrevocably affecting Southern communities – especially poor communities and

communities of color that were relegated for centuries to land most vulnerable to flooding, pollution and dislocation. And just as these vulnerable communities have for centuries made a way with what they have, Southerners are on the leading edge of developing new ways to live together with each other and with our changing climate.

Climate change resilience work is inherently and fundamentally intersectional in the South. Southerners understand that the same moneyed power players who profit from extraction and exploitation of the physical environment also profit from artificially cheap labor, from private prisons and from other ways of exploiting human resources. What's needed is a comprehensive strategy to build the power of grassroots organizations that truly represent the communities they serve to challenge this entrenched status quo.

Grassroots leaders are fusing environmental, economic and racial justice strategies to seek a holistic solution to the challenges their communities face. Deeply rooted funders are leveraging the capital at their disposal to build the nonprofit infrastructure needed to sustain grassroots power. And larger national funders are trying out bold new strategies informed by their grassroots partners, bringing to bear their expertise and immense resources.

It is time for other foundations – both in the South and nationally – to meet these pioneers where they are and bring their own resources to the table. Any funder concerned about health, economic prosperity, access to opportunity or the physical and spiritual survival of coastal communities can and must find a way to invest in Southern climate resilience.

DO'S AND DON'TS

Nonprofit leaders, advocates and funders across the South offer some insights that will lead to greater and more sustainable impact for Southern philanthropic investments.



DO make sure you have “skin in the game.”



DO seek to understand the holistic history of Southern communities’ relationship to the land.



DO look to intermediaries as key partners in making your investments more accessible to grassroots grantees.



DON'T rely only on established funding streams to well-resourced Southern organizations.



DON'T dismiss existing infrastructure.



DON'T expect to be in the driver’s seat.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Are you ready to engage in high-impact philanthropy in the South? Here are a few recommendations to guide the way:

- Identify opportunities to fund climate, economic and social resilience and solutions in the South within current grantmaking priorities or expand priorities to include those strategies.
- Deploy your financial, human and political capital to ensure underrepresented communities - those most impacted by environmental injustice - are meaningful partners in climate resilience conversations.
- Seek reparative, healing, honest relationships between grantee and grantor and within grantee communities.
- Make a healthy, resilient social change infrastructure a strategic priority.